

Message Text

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EXDIS, GENEVA FOR AMB YOUNG

FOL RPT BEIRUT 3755 ACTION SECSTATE DAMASCUS INFO AMMAN
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S E C R E T BEIRUT 3755

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PERP MOPS LE SY
SUBJ: BEIRUT FIGHTING - SYRIAN INTENTIONS

1. SUMMARY: CONSIDERABLE UNCERTAINTY PREVAILS, AT
LEAST IN BEIRUT, ON QUESTION OF WHAT, EXACTLY, SYRIANS
HOPE TO ACHIEVE BY THEIR VERY HARD STRIKE OF LAST FOUR
DAYS AT CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN EAST BEIRUT. PUBLICLY,
CAMILLE CHAMOUN IS TAKING THE HARDEST LINE CRITICAL OF
THE SYRIANS, BUT PIERRE GEMAYEL IS ALSO IMPLYING BASE
MOTIVES. BEIRUT PRESS IS OFFERING SPECULATION ON THE
QUESTION. GOL LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN SILENT PUBLICLY ON
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THE QUESTION, AND BECAUSE OF DIFFICULTY OF PHYSICAL
TRAVEL IN THE CITY AND SUBSTANTIAL BREAKDOWN OF TELEPHONE
SYSTEM BETWEEN EAST AND WEST BEIRUT, WE HAVE BEEN
UNABLE FOR LAST TWO DAYS TO HAVE ANY PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS.
SYRIAN GOVERNMENT'S LINE IS QUITE CLEAR, ON OTHER HAND,
CRITICIZING LEBANESE FRONT BROADLY OF SEEKING PARTITION,
DESTRUCTION OF LEBANON AND OF NUMEROUS SPECIFIC PROVOCATIONS
OF ADF SYRIAN FORCES ON THE GROUND. OUR OWN VIEW IS THAT
SYRIAN PERCEPTION GENERALLY IS SUBSTANTIALLY CORRECT,
BUT THAT SYRIAN MILITARY TACTIC OF LARGELY INDISCRIMINATE

ARTILLERY FIRE ALL OVER EAST BEIRUT MAY PROVE TO BE BOTH POLITICALLY AND MILITARILY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. LEBANESE FRONT LEADERSHIP ATTITUDES. CAMILLE CHAMOUN APPEARS TO BE THE MOST PUBLICLY OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF SYRIAN MILITARY ACTION IN BEIRUT OVER LAST FOUR DAYS. INDEPENDENT AN NAHAR JULY 4 QUOTED CHAMOUN AS SAYING THAT SYRIAN TROOPS ARE FIGHTING IN BEIRUT TO BOOST SYRIAN ARMY MORALE, BECAUSE "THEY ARE UNABLE TO RECOVER THE GOLAN HEIGHTS" FROM ISRAEL. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH A SENIOR EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEE ON JULY 2, CHAMOUN AND VARIOUS OF HIS FOLLOWERS, INCLUDING NLP VICE PRESIDENT KAZIM KHALIL AND BUSINESSMAN FRANCOIS JABRE, DESCRIBED SYRIAN ACTION IN BEIRUT AS A PROLONGATION OF THE BEKAA INCIDENT OF JUNE 28 (IN WHICH SOME 30 PHALANGISTS WERE KILLED, PROBABLY BY TROOPS OF RIF'AT ASSAD, BROTHER OF THE SYRIAN PRESIDENT.) CHAMOUN COMPLAINED THAT WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE CHRISTIAN AREAS IS NOT HAPPENING IN ANY OTHER AREA OF LEBANON AND ACCUSED PRESIDENT SARKIS OF GIVING ORDERS TO THE SYRIANS TO LIQUIDATE THE CHRISTIAN PARTIES, ESPECIALLY THE PHALANGE.

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3. ON THE OTHER HAND, ALWAYS CAREFUL TO AVOID SEEMING TO CRITICIZE THE SYRIANS, PHALANGE LEADER PIERRE GEMAYEL IN HIS DAILY PRESS CONFERENCE JULY 4, ACCORDING TO L'ORIENT-LE JOUR JULY 5, SAID: "I CANNOT IMAGINE A SINGLE INSTANCE IN WHICH DAMASCUS WOULD WANT TO STRIKE THOSE SAME LEBANESE WHO HAD WELCOMED ITS INITIATIVE AND HAD EXPRESSED (TO SYRIA) THEIR SUPPORT AND APPRECIATION, TO THE EXTENT THAT THIS INITIATIVE WAS FREE OF SECTARIANISM." THE SYRIAN INITIATIVE IN LEBANON, GEMAYEL SAID, "HAD REVERSED THE ATTITUDES OF FOREIGN OPINION, WHICH WAS BEHOLDEN TO IMAGES OF FANATICISM AND RACISM ENGRAVED IN PEOPLE'S MINDS BY RIVAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION WELL KNOWN TO SYRIA AND ALL THE ARAB COUNTRIES." COMMENT: GEMAYEL IS SAYING THINGS WHICH THE SYRIANS LIKE TO HEAR, BUT IN SUCH A WAY AS TO LET THE LEBANESE POPULATION KNOW HIS REAL THOUGHT, THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE VIOLATED THEIR ARAB LEAGUE MANDATE, AND BECOME A SECTARIAN FORCE DETERMINED TO REDUCE THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS. END COMMENT.

4. PRESS SPECULATION. INDEPENDENT LEADING ARABIC DAILY AN NAHAR JULY 4 LISTED FOLLOWING AS CONDITIONS BEING POSED BY THE SYRIANS PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION OF A REAL CEASE-FIRE:

(A) "GIVING SYRIA CERTAIN DEFENSE AND SECURITY FACILITIES IN SPECIFIC LEBANESE AREAS AS A PRECAUTION

AGAINST ISRAELI AGRESSION;" (WE HAVE NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON WHAT SUCH FACILITIES OR AREAS MIGHT BE.)

(B) "A DECISION ON REBUILDING THE ARMY (OF LEBANON) TO INSURE A NATIONAL BALANCE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A HIGHER DEFENSE COUNCIL WHICH WOULD SUPERVISE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ARMED FORCES. . . ON A BASIS THAT "LEBANON'S SECURITY IS PART OF SYRIA'S SECURITY AND VICE-VERSA." (AN ALLUSION TO THE OCCASIONALLY RUMORED SYRIAN-LEBANESE SECRET

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MUTUAL DEFENSE PACT);

(C) SETTLEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF REGULAR LEBANESE ARMY FORCES IN THE ISRAELI BORDER AREA "WHO ESTABLISHED CLOSE COOPERATION WITH ISRAEL;"

(D) "STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF THE ADF IN ALL LEBANESE DISTRICTS, AND ISSUING WRITTEN ORDERS TO THIS EFFECT."

5. PRO-SYRIAN ASH SHARQ AND AL LIWA, AS WELL AS LEFTIST AS SAFIR, REPORTED THE SAME SYRIAN CONDITIONS, EXCEPT THE FIRST ONE. COMMENT: REPORTING BY AN NAHAR, WHICH SUPPORTS THE GOL (SENIOR EDITOR MICHELE ABU JAWDEH IS CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND OF PRESIDENT SARKIS) AS WELL AS REPETITION IN PRO-SYRIAN PRESS, LEND ACCOUNT A HIGH DEGREE OF CREDIBILITY. END COMMENT.

6. GOL COMMENTARY. PUBLICLY GOL LEADERS HAVE SAID NOTHING ON QUESTION OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN PRESENT FIGHTING IN BEIRUT. HOWEVER, ON JULY 2 PHALANGE POLITICAL BUREAU MEMBER KARIM PAKRADOUNI (WHO HAS BEEN DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN SYRIAN-GOL AND SYRIAN-LEBANESE FRONT NEGOTIATIONS) TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE WAS CONCERNED THAT CEASE-FIRE (OF THAT DAY) MIGHT WELL NOT HOLD, BECAUSE THERE WERE MUCH DEEPER POLITICAL PROBLEMS TO BE RESOLVED. THE IMPLICATION WAS THAT THE SYRIANS, INDEED, WERE MAKING MAJOR DEMANDS, TO WHICH LEBANESE FRONT AND/OR GOL HAD NOT AGREED.

7. SYRIAN LINE. WE NOTE FROM EMBASSY DAMASCUS REPORTING (FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM'S VIEWS- DAMASCUS 3769; SYRIANS PROTEST AGAINST USG JULY 2 STATEMENT - DAMASCUS 3790) AND COMMENTS OF SYRIAN SECRET

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AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON TO ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRAWFORD ON JULY 3 (STATE 168930) THAT THE SYRIANS ARE HIGHLY CONSISTENT: ADF WAS RESPONDING TO DELIBERATE PROVOCATION ON THE PART OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA, PARTICULARLY THE PHALANGE;

PHALANGE AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN WERE TRYING TO IMPLEMENT A PLAN TO DESTROY MOVEMENT TOWARDS SECURITY IN LEBANON WHICH BEGAN WITH IHDIN OPERATION IN WHICH PHALANGISTS MILITIA ASSASSINATED TONY FRANJIYAH. WE DO NOT ACCEPT FOR A MOMENT, HOWEVER, SYRIAN LINE THAT PHALANGE ITSELF PERPETRATED THE BEKAA MASSACRE OF JUNE 28.

8. COMMENT: OUR OWN VIEW IS THAT CURRENT FIGHTING MUST BE VIEWED IN CONTEXT OF STRUGGLE BETWEEN RIGHTIST MILITIAS, PARTICULARLY THE PHALANGE, AND THE SYRIAN ADF, WHICH REALLY BEGAN EVEN BEFORE THE SYRIANS MARCHED INTO BEIRUT IN NOVEMBER 1976, WHEN THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE CHRISTIAN RESENTMENT THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD OCCUPY BOTH PALESTINO-LEFTIST AND CHRISTIAN AREAS. AFTER ALL, THE "LEBANESE FRONT" HAD THOUGHT THAT THE SYRIANS WERE TO ASSIST THEM IN THEIR LEGITIMATE AND LEGAL DEFENSE OF LEBANON.

9. FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE SYRIAN OCCUPATION, BACHIR GEMAYEL IN PARTICULAR TOOK A HOSTILE AND HATEFUL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SYRIANS. EARLY IN 1977, PHALANGE TRAINING CAMPS IN THE MOUNTAINS WERE FEATURING IMAGES OF SYRIAN SOLDIERS AS TARGETS FOR RIFLE PRACTICE. THERE WERE NUMEROUS INCIDENTS THROUGHOUT 1977. BACHIR REGARDED IT AS AN INSULT THAT SYRIAN SOLDIERS SHOULD BE POSTED ANYWHERE NEAR PHALANGE PARTY OFFICES.

10. IN THE FEBRUARY 1978 FAYYADIYAH INCIDENTS, THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, PARTICULARLY THE PHALANGE, JUMPED TO THE AID OF THE LEBANESE ARMY IN ITS BRAWL WITH THE SYRIANS. WHEN, AS A RESULT OF THAT EPISODE, THE
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SYRIANS REGROUPED THEIR FORCES AND REDUCED THE NUMBER OF ROADBLOCKS IN EAST BEIRUT, BOTH BACHIR GEMAYEL AND DANY CHAMOUN WERE DELIGHTED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT. DANY AT ONE POINT TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT SYRIANS HAD FINALLY BEEN REDUCED TO THE ROLE OF TRAFFIC COPS, WHICH WAS ALL THAT WAS NEEDED OF THEM. IN APRIL 1978, FIGHTING BETWEEN RIGHTIST MILITIAS AND LEFTIST MILITIAS IN AYN AR-RUMMANEH-SHIAH METAMORPHASIZED INTO FIGHTING BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS AND THE SYRIANS AFTER THE SYRIANS, AT THE REQUEST OF THE GOL AND ON THE BASIS OF A WRITTEN AGREEMENT, WHICH PIERRE GEMAYEL HIMSELF HAD SIGNED, ENTERED THE AREA BUT ENCOUNTERED PHALANGIST RESISTANCE.

11. MOST RECENTLY, OF COURSE, THE IHDIN OPERATION WAS A DIRECT PHALANGIST ASSAULT ON THE FRANJIYAH FAMILY, PROBABLY SYRIA'S MOST USEFUL CHRISTIAN FRIENDS IN LEBANON.

12. CAMILLE CHAMOUN MAY BE RIGHT IN HIS STATEMENT

(PARA 2 ABOVE) THAT THE SYRIANS THIS TIME ARE OUT TO DESTROY THE PHALANGE AND NLP PARTIES, OR AT LEAST THEIR MILITIAS, ALTOGETHER, AND THE TONE OF THE DAMASCUS PRESS IN RECENT DAYS CERTAINLY SUPPORTS THAT VIEW. WE DON'T KNOW, BUT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED TO EVENTUALLY LEARN THAT MANY OF THE VARIOUS INCIDENTS IMMEDIATELY PRECEEDING THE GENERALIZATION OF FIGHTING ON JUN 1 WERE SYRIAN FABRICATIONS OR DELIBERATELY PROVOKED. THE SYRIANS WERE CERTAINLY PREPARED TO FIGHT.

13. THEIR METHODS MAY BE BRUTAL AND MILITARILY INAPPROPRIATE. THE SYRIANS ARE NOT VERY PRECISE ARTILLERYMEN, AND ARE INEPT AT HOUSE-TO-HOUSE STREET FIGHTING. THEY PROBABLY DON'T KNOW, HOWEVER, ANY BETTER WAY TO GO ABOUT
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IT. THE PITY IS THAT THEY MAY BE DIGGING THEIR OWN GRAVE, AS THE CHRISTIAN POPULATION OF LEBANON GENERALLY COMES TO PERCEIVE THE SYRIAN ARMY AS AN IMPLACABLE ENEMY AND FIGHTS BACK WITH INFERIOR ARTILLERY BUT BETTER KNOWLEDGE OF THE TERRAIN. THE PHALANGE AND NLP MILITIAS ARE SKILLED AT THE TYPE OF STREET FIGHTING WHICH, SOONER OR LATER, WILL BE INEVITABLE IF THE SYRIANS WANT TO ACHIEVE A MAXIMUM OBJECTIVE, FOR EXAMPLE, TO DESTROY THE PHALANGE AND NLP ALTOGETHER. THE MORE THE CRISIS DRAGS ON, THE GREATER THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY ITSELF WILL, IN IMPORTANT NUMBERS, DEFECT TO THE MILITIAS' CAUSE, FURTHER WEAKENING THE PRESENT SYRIAN MILITARY ADVANTAGE.
END COMMENT.

14. LATE ENTRY. MORNING OF JULY 6, THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRIVATE SECRETARY, ABDUL RAHMAN SHAYKHA TOLD EMBOFF SYRIANS HAD POSED TWO FUNDAMENTAL CONDITIONS FOR AN END TO THE FIGHTING: (A) THE RIGHT TO DEPLOY THEIR TROOPS ANYWHERE IN LEBANON; AND (B) THE DISARMING OF CHRISTIAN MILITIA (SEPTTEL).
PARKER

UNQUOTE VANCE

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